

# Zero Zero Zero

By Morrie Mullins

*In a recent article appearing on Cularin's holonets, Senator Lavina Wren's performance during an impassioned speech to the Galactic Senate was likened to that of a female gundark protecting her young. "It was," the author said, "a display of barely contained rage. All teeth and muscle, Senator Wren pounded her podium hard enough that it spewed forth a shower of sparks that caught the hem of her robe on fire. If the Senator noticed the smoke and flames before her aides put it out, she gave no sign. She was too busy daring the Senate to ignore Cularin's plight, calling into question the loyalty of anyone who refused to assist her home, who ignored the fact that the single largest Jedi training facility outside of Coruscant might be in danger. Only a rebuke from the Supreme Chancellor himself quieted the furious Senator. She took a deep breath and asked permission to lodge a third formal request for military assistance. Her voice, calm and dangerous, offered none of the fear her aides -- their faces pale and drawn behind her -- clearly felt at the request. They knew, as she must, that a third denial of assistance would indicate that the Senate viewed the request as frivolous, and would consider no further requests for assistance for the duration of whatever current crisis the system faced . . ."*



*What follows is the Lady Senator's subsequent address to the people of Cularin, delivered after the Senate's decision. (The information in her speech ties in to "Decision: Coruscant," the latest scenario for the **Living Force** campaign.)*

Citizens of Cularin. It will come as no surprise to anyone that the war across the galaxy seems to be escalating. Many lives have been lost, many worlds ruined, by the forces of the Confederacy of Independent Systems and an insidious enemy who seems, if reports are true, to have begun specifically targeting Jedi for extermination. When the war was just a war -- in the sense that any war is ever "just" anything -- I found myself able to understand the Senate's reluctance to provide assistance to our home. Understand, but not accept.

Toward the end of last year, I filed my first formal request for military assistance to the Senate. The request was denied after minimal discussion, and I did not fight it openly. There are times and places to fight, but the flight deck of a ship whose pilot is trying to navigate a drunken asteroid field is not one of them. When you find yourself in such a situation, the only responsible thing to do is step back and wait. Go aft, find a quiet place to sit and collect your thoughts. Save the fighting for a time when it won't get everyone on board killed, or for a time when *not* fighting will send your ship hurtling into the nearest sun.

The first petition is protocol. That's the way of things. I knew nothing would come of it, but as I told you when last I addressed Cularin, I had to ask, and I had to recognize that Cularin is uniquely capable of protecting herself. There's no need, I thought, to call in a Jedi-led clone army. We have our own Jedi army, and we have the people of Cularin herself. I cannot think of a stronger, more capable people than you. Perhaps they exist somewhere in the galaxy. If they do, the Confederacy armies should beware of them, just as they are clearly wary of Cularin.

It was protocol, but it was necessary protocol. To not file a petition under those circumstances would have taken away the possibility of requesting aid if the situation were to escalate. It would have set us adrift without a locator beacon. So I filed, I was denied, and the universe went on.

Three months ago, one of my senior aides informed me that another threat had arisen within Cularin. She assured me that while our citizens had risen to the challenge, this situation might be a sign of new dangers.

This forced me to make a difficult decision. As pilot of our shared vessel, whenever threats arise, I have three switches on my control panel that I can flip to attempt evasive maneuvers. The first of these, I flipped when I lodged my initial petition for military aid. This switch rarely does anything but prime the ship's engines, but sometimes, that's all it takes. It was not so in this case, so now I had only two switches left. Put differently, I could petition for assistance twice more within the year. But no more than that. Each petition requires a separate vote, and if three votes are denied within the space of a year, the petitioning system is treated as making frivolous requests. Past Senators have abused the willingness of the Senate to hear requests for assistance, and Supreme Chancellor Palpatine wisely enacted a restriction on the number of such requests that may be heard from the representatives of any system.

The decision, then, was whether to flip the second switch -- whether to ask the Senate for aid and risk being refused. I spoke at length with Sa'arli, my aide, and decided to petition once more. The situation in Cularin seemed to have become direr, and in my judgment, the lack of progress and a rumored increase in the Thaereian Navy justified a second petition.

The fight this time was harder. I asked, I pleaded, I made the case that Cularin needed to be protected. We might not be at the center of the galaxy, but we are its very heart. We are the people who make the galaxy what it is. We are a microcosm of all the galaxy has to offer, with hundreds of species represented, with our growing Militia, with a Jedi Academy, and with our own invading army. Beyond all of that, Cularin has faced threats the rest of the galaxy can only imagine. I won't enumerate them now -- you live with them every day. But I stood before the Senate and listed the threats faced by the heroes of Cularin over the past decade. Point by point, I went through what you have been forced to endure. I provided them with a list of the names of the brave individuals of many species who have given their lives in defense of our home.

I could not have made a stronger case. I could not have shown the Senate my love for my home, and your willingness to fight

for our home, any more clearly. The Senate voted.

The petition was denied.

There is no time for self-blame in politics. Things are what they are, and we cannot dwell on them. It's one of the first lessons learned by anyone entering the political arena.

It's one I still haven't learned as well as I'd like.

My weakness -- and I tell you this now, Cularin, so that you will understand me all the better when the time comes to decide if I will continue to represent you in the Senate -- is that I love my home too deeply. Too completely. Any failure is unacceptable to me, if it means my people will suffer. There can be no justification for suffering in Cularin. There can be no "acceptable" level of loss. But this is exactly what the Senate told me. "Cularin has taken losses, but every system has taken losses, and Cularin has managed to hold its own thus far without intervention. Be proud of your people, Senator Wren. You're right that they are the heart of the galaxy, but the heart must beat on its own. It must be trusted to keep up its rhythm. If you attempt surgery on a healthy heart, you risk the entire body, especially when there are other wounds that must be treated first."

In my pride, I represented you too truthfully. I could have downplayed your strengths. That is not, however, the way I view Cularin. The surest way for me to be voted out of office would be to call my people "weak" in order to bring outside forces to our aid.

Then I realized that the second surest way would be to fail to do whatever I can to keep you alive. In short, there is nothing I can do to extend my political career.

This realization freed me. I cannot possibly continue to represent Cularin if my focus is on my career. My career can rot. Elect me next time or don't. Right now, I can't say that I care. The only thing I care about is keeping my people alive and piloting our ship to safety.

I could have petitioned again immediately, but I knew the outcome of such a petition. It would be denied, and we would be on our own. Then, last week, I learned more of the leader of the Confederacy army, a general who seems to exist to kill Jedi. My heart nearly stopped. If the goal of this creature is to kill Jedi, then the single place where he can do the most damage is in our home. It wouldn't just be the Jedi who died, though. He would come with an army, and Cularin would be wiped from the galaxy.

It never crossed my mind that a third petition might be denied. The threat was so obvious, so direct, that there could be no way that a reasonable Senate could deny my request. I prepared my speech. I scrapped my speech. I prepared another, then a third.

When I stood before the Senate, I ignored everything I had written and I spoke from my heart. By now, you've seen the recordings. Most of the galaxy has seen the recordings. You know that I held nothing back.

I shouted. I stomped. I dared them to ignore our plight.

After I finished to a resounding silence, the Senate took my dare.

There will be no help from the armies of the Republic for Cularin. We will fight our own war, as we have always fought our own wars.

And we will win. Because we are Cularin. Because this is our home. I will continue the fight from here, but if the day comes that the battles reach your doorsteps, look for me. On that day, I will come home, and I will draw my blaster, and I will fight beside you.

On that day, and until that day, may the Force be with Cularin.

*If you want to learn more about the **Living Force** campaign and how to take part in the adventure, this [introduction](#) will get you started.*